



## ARTICLE 8 - JIU60

# The JIU's contribution to effective human resources management

*This article is part of a series commemorating the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations system highlighting its mandate, evolution and contribution to the United Nations system over the last six decades.*

In line with repeated resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly, the Joint Inspection Unit has consistently examined human resources management in the United Nations system as a cornerstone of organizational governance and institutional effectiveness.

Human resources represent the most valuable asset of the UN system and can account for the majority of organizational expenditures. Over the past decades, the JIU has conducted numerous reviews, both system-wide and single organization, where human resources management constituted a core focus area. In doing so, the Unit has been guided by the values enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, including the standards of efficiency, competence, integrity and equitable geographical representation, as well as consideration for transparency of recruitment processes and gender balance.

A central contribution of the JIU has been to assess how these principles are acknowledged and implemented in practice through policies, procedures and decision-making processes. The JIU's recommendations - informed by comparative analysis, interviews, surveys and consultations conducted across participating organizations - are designed to consider specific mandates, operating contexts and constraints of each organization while promoting coherence, consistency and good practices across the system.

At a time of financial constraints, workforce restructuring and evolving operational demands, the effective management of human resources is not only an administrative function - it is a strategic enabler of mandate delivery, institutional credibility and organizational resilience.

## Inclusive and equitable workforce practices

United Nations system organizations seek to strengthen their workforce through strategies that seek to recruit and retain competent and motivated personnel representing a broad diversity of skills, backgrounds and experiences that are capable of delivering upon complex mandates within time constraints and evolving operational contexts.

A key, long-standing priority to this end is the promotion of gender balance and equitable geographical representation. Multiple JIU reviews have addressed these priorities through, for example, a report on *Staff recruitment* (2012), which issued a specific note on gender balance and geographical distribution and further identified fifteen recruitment benchmarks to guide executive heads when hiring external candidates.

More recent JIU reports reflect an evolving understanding of the importance of mutual respect in the workplace and parity in employment opportunities, including a *Review of measures addressing racism and racial discrimination* (2022), a *Review of the UN system-wide action plan on gender equality and the empowerment of women* (2019) and a review on *Enhancing accessibility for persons with disabilities to conferences and meetings* (2018).

## Selection and appointment of senior management

The process of selecting and appointing executive heads and senior managers has also featured prominently in the JIU's work. Reports issued on *Selection and conditions of service of executive heads* (2009), *Transparency in the selection and appointment of senior managers* (2011) and *Selection and appointment process for UN resident coordinators* (2013) have examined the transparency and integrity of selection processes at the highest levels of the system. These reports emphasize the importance of open vacancy announcements, clearly defined qualifications, term limits and effective mechanisms that prevent conflicts of interest.

The JIU has also advocated for more inclusive and credible selection processes for senior officials that should include hearings and exchanges between candidates and Member States. A notable outcome of these recommendations was the introduction of candidates' forums in certain organizations, such as UNIDO, as well as the establishment of public hearings during the selection process of the United Nations Secretary-General. These developments represent significant steps towards greater transparency and accountability in senior appointments.

### Inter-agency mobility

The concept of inter-agency mobility has long been prominent in the United Nations system as a means of strengthening unity of purpose, a common culture and shared values. Earlier JIU reviews addressed *Staff rotation* (1991) and *Internal mobility* (2006), while more recent reviews have focussed on *Staff exchange and inter-agency mobility measures* (2019). The JIU has recommended that all UN system staff should be allowed to compete for vacant posts on an equal basis to an organization's own staff. It has also called for the International Civil Service Commission to periodically examine the integration of inter-agency mobility into human resources management policies of organizations.

### Work-life balance and physical and mental well-being

The COVID-19 pandemic considerably disrupted business-as-usual in terms of how and where we work and communicate. Since then, the JIU has given considerable attention to topics such as *Flexible working arrangements* (2023), *Mental health and well-being policies* (2023), *Health insurance schemes* (2023) and *Health services* (2025). Such reviews have recommended that organizations define an evidence-based and data-driven approach to the mental health and well-being of personnel by identifying gaps and areas for improvement in access to healthcare for personnel, integrating flexible working arrangement considerations into organizational human resources management strategies and developing methods to measure the impact of the assumed benefits and unintended consequences of flexible working arrangements.

### Staff protection and accountability

Over the past two decades, numerous JIU reviews have examined processes and mechanisms that organizations use to ensure duty of care and to create a healthy working environment where staff feel secure in carrying out their functions and trust that allegations of misconduct and abuse will be handled in a fair, impartial, thorough and timely manner. These reviews have covered topics such as sexual exploitation and abuse, whistle-blower protection, internal justice systems and mediation functions through a *Review of policies and practices to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse* (2025), a *Review of the ombudsman and mediation function* (2025, 2015), a *Review of internal appeal mechanisms* (2023), a *Review of whistle-blower protection policies and practices* (2018) and a *Review of staff-management relations* (2012, 2011).

The JIU has recommended that organizations uphold the independence of the heads of the ethics, oversight, ombudsman and mediator functions and develop anonymous channels to report misconduct and wrongdoing. To enhance staff-management relations, the Unit has called for recognition of the right of staff to collective bargaining, mandatory reporting of field staff challenges in human resources reports, guaranteed access by staff representatives to all available means of communication with staff-at-large without censorship and rules to protect staff representatives against prejudicial treatment in the conduct of their functions.

The JIU has further recommended that management and staff representatives in all organizations jointly develop and conduct all-staff surveys every two to four years to gauge the pulse of the organization on various aspects related to their work environment. The JIU applies this approach in its review methodology by conducting all-staff surveys as part of system-wide thematic reviews and single-organization management and administration reviews. The findings from such surveys often serve as critical building blocks for recommendations issued by the Unit.

“ Together, these reports underscore the growing importance of staff protection, well-being, ethical conduct and effective conflict resolution. ”



Inspector Eileen A. Cronin

### Ensuring fair treatment of affiliate personnel

The issue of shrinking or stagnant budgets has been exacerbated by expanding mandates. As a result, affiliate personnel increasingly constitute a major proportion of the workforce in many United Nations system organizations. Accordingly, the JIU has conducted reviews on the *Internship programme* (2018), the *Use of non-staff personnel and related contractual modalities* (2014), *Individual consultancies* (2012) and *Associate experts* (2008) with the aim of harmonizing policies related to contractual modalities, remuneration and working conditions. The JIU has recommended that organizations utilize a clear, fair and rational mechanism to determine remuneration levels of affiliate personnel, guarantee their access to appropriate formal internal justice mechanisms and allow long-serving affiliate personnel to apply as internal candidates for vacant staff positions.

### Change management and knowledge transfer

JIU reviews over the years have also looked into organizational transitions and their effective management through reviews on *Change management* (2019), *Succession planning* (2016) and the *Use of retirees and staff retained beyond the mandatory age of separation* (2014).

The JIU has recommended that organizations give greater prominence to the role of strategic human resources management in organizational change management, including promoting changes in individual attitudes and behaviours, establishing mechanisms to reinforce these changes and creating channels to communicate feedback to all personnel.

### Looking ahead

The most recent JIU reports reflect a shift towards emerging and cross-cutting human resources challenges. Together, these reports underscore the growing importance of curating and retaining a competent workforce by promoting appropriate staff protections, well-being measures, ethical conduct standards and effective conflict resolution mechanisms as integral components of human resources management.

Over the past sixty years, the JIU has played a crucial role in shaping human resources management across the UN system. From recruitment and leadership selection to mobility, well-being and workforce sustainability, the JIU's work reflects a continuous effort to strengthen governance, enhance accountability and support organizations in delivering their mandates. As the UN faces increasingly complex global challenges, effective human resources management is fundamental to the system's capacity to deliver results, adapt to change and maintain the trust of Member States and the public.

“ The JIU's work reflects a continuous effort to strengthen human resources management, enhance accountability and support organizations in effectively managing their workforce to deliver their mandates. ”



Inspector Victor Moraru